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Wright reaches state finals for academically-gifted Mats wrestling team

By Karl Buscheck



Skyler Wright in his state match against Dillon Cravens, #5 Central Section Senior from Bakersfield Photos provided



Wright grapples Heritage in his qualifying match at NCS.

It was during Skyler Wright's sophomore season that Jose Herrera, the head coach of the Miramonte wrestling program, began to grasp just how talented a wrestler he had in his midst.

That spring, Wright, who started working out in the weight room as a fifth grader and wrestling as an eighth grader at Orinda Intermediate School, secured an NCS spot and went on to topple the No. 3 seed in the tournament.

"From the very first sight ... (I could tell) he was just a fanatic," Herrera recalled of the senior star, who took off in the spring of 2015 when he learned to master the technical side of the sport.

This spring, Wright anchored a Mats team that not only claimed third place at NCS, but that was also the most academically successful in the region. Miramonte posted the highest GPA for any team with at least seven wrestlers on the roster, making the program the NCS CIF Scholastic Championship Team for 2016-2017.

The feat impressed, but didn't surprise the head coach.

"I'm extremely proud," Herrera said. "But again, being in this community that I'm in as a coach, that's kind of the standard and almost the expectation of every student to kind of overachieve and anything but the highest (level) is unacceptable."

At the NCS meet, held on Feb. 24 and Feb. 25, Wright placed in second in the 152-weight class, earning an automatic bid to the state finals.

"He was one of the top 32 wrestlers in that weight class in the state of California," Herrera said. "And the state of California has over 1,000 wrestling programs, so he's con-

sidered in the top two, three percent of athletes in the state."

At the state championship – hosted at Rabobank Arena in Bakersfield on March 3 and March 4 – Wright advanced to the second round of the competition before exiting the tournament. Wright took down Dillon Cravens of Bakersfield – the No. 5 overall wrestler in the Central Section – before losing to Ed Bilezekchian of Santa Ana in his second match.

The loss brought an end to Wright's wrestling tenure with the Mats and also capped his second consecutive season in which he'd been the top 152-pound athlete in the the league.



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